

Fig. 1. Belgium double-barrelled .410 shotgun pistol and stock separate.

The odyssey of a Belgium double-barrelled .410 shotgun pistol No. 103 with detachable shoulder stock

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This Double Barrelled Hammer Pistol with 25 cm. barrels and detachable stock (see Plates 1–5) and taking the short 2-in. cartridge was bought by H. J. de S. Disney for £6 Sterling in 1946 in answer to an advertisement he placed in the *Exchange and Mart* paper, the English equivalent to the *Trading Post* paper published in Sydney. Possibly, it had belonged to someone who had been killed in World War II. Disney had been accepted as Science Assistant to the Director, Guy Shortridge, of the Kaffarian Museum, King Williams Town, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. He had bought it for collecting specimens. The British police allowed him a firearm certificate for this purpose.

Disney arrived at the Kaffarian Museum at the end of 1946. He tried out the pistol several times but always shot too high. In March 1947 he had a leather holster made to his design by a Cape Coloured man for 7/6d Sterling. The D rings low down on each side of the holster were so the holster could be tied to the thigh like a Wild West gunfighter. It could be slung under the arm with the buckled strap going over the shoulder. It could, thus, be carried concealed

under a jacket or bushjacket. In South Africa he usually carried it this way more for protection, when he wandered over the veldt and passed groups of native huts.

In 1948 Disney moved to a Cotton Research Station near Kilosa, Tanganyika Territory (now Tanzania), East Africa. He still fired high so he pulled the pistol to bits thinking the trigger springs were too strong. In 1950 Mr G. R. Cunningham van Someren came to the research station to discuss using pesticides on cotton. He was born in Kenya and had done a lot of hunting and had a good knowledge of guns. He put the pistol together again and showed Disney how to shoot with it. Only the tip of the foresight should be seen between the two hammers. From this moment Disney became very successful. He carried the pistol on his left side with the strap threaded through the holster belt loop, so that the strap formed two loops through which the belt went. As the pistol was long, this allowed the holster to be moved around. He carried it when he rode a motorcycle round the cotton fields and sometimes shot pigeons to give variety to the usual local native beef. In 1953 Disney became the



Fig. 2. Pistol in Disney-designed holster made by a Cape Coloured man in South Africa.

zoologist investigating the *Quelea* weaver bird problem and this work took him to the central plateau. Here he collected many specimens with the pistol. He used a No. 10 shot in the right barrel and a No. 6 in the left barrel. The No. 6 shot had about 200 pellets and sufficient weight for good penetration. The *Quelea* nested in vast colonies in low *Acacia* trees, about 15 feet in height. Here, he was able to stand under the trees and select birds and shoot them with the No. 10 shot without damaging them too much. If small birds were too close he would try to get a few leaves between him and the bird to deaden the shot and not blow the bird to bits. He found that when shooting one-handed, it was best to aim a foot below the bird as the "kick" of the pistol jerked it up to be on target. Flying birds were shot holding the pistol like a shotgun with the left arm straight and holding the barrels. In this way it was possible to swing on to a bird in the same way as with a shotgun. He got the idea of a straight arm by reading an article about an American sharpshooter who shot flying objects with a rifle. The sharpshooter said the secret was to have a straight arm and where this was pointing was where the rifle was pointed. When using two hands at a sitting target the aim was dead on with just the tip of the foresight visible. Guinea fowl were shot by aiming at the base of the neck, in the hope that a pellet or two would hit them in the neck or head; the large Yellow-necked Spurfowl were shot on the ground and in flight and many other birds such as sandgrouse, were often shot from a landrover, which allowed a close approach. If there was a pair on the ground one would be shot on the ground and the other with the left barrel as it flew away. Once when he was examining an old colony of *Quelea* nests a bat flew out of a nest and was collected as a result of the pistol being ready on the left hip. This bat when sent to the British Museum (Natural History) appeared to be new to science. A small Dik Dik antelope was also collected with the pistol. The pistol was usually carried fully loaded as the hammers went well down into the holster. The effective range with No 6 shot was up to about 25 yards. One specimen of a small species of African Bustard was shot at 40 yards (the distance was paced out after it was shot). For small birds with No. 10 shot the range was about 10 yards and if the range was considered rather far and it was thought the pellets might have spread too wide or not have enough weight, No. 6 shot was used in the hope that one pellet would go straight. The pistol, being carried ready on the left hip, was also very useful for finishing off big birds which had been hit with the 12-bore

shotgun, but could still run and were too close to be shot again with the 12 bore without ruining them.

With independence coming to Tanganyika, Disney managed to get himself appointed out of the African bush to the post of Curator of Birds to The Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia. The Customs Department in Sydney took the pistol and held it in bond until he had got a permanent address. The New South Wales police issued a licence for the pistol for collecting specimens for the Museum. Twenty-nine years later the NSW government, in October 1991, issued him with a Life Licence for \$50, but in May 1992 they changed the law again so that no individual could own a pistol. By this time he had retired from the Museum and had few opportunities to collect for the Museum. He had had cataracts removed from his eyes and lens implants put in and was having difficulty getting the sight lined up properly. So in December 1992, after 46 years of ownership, he passed the pistol over to Licenced Gun Dealer Mr. Bevan Brown of Canberra.

Disney never used the shoulder stock for the pistol as this would have been difficult to carry and would have prevented a quick "draw".

He collected many specimens for the Museum with the pistol, including Welcome and White-backed Swallows in flight; bats at dusk and when spotlighted at night with a torch; rabbits in the daytime and when spotlighted at night; a Nail-tailed Wallaby was shot, with one No. 6 pellet in the skull; a migrating butterfly, a Caper White, was shot with No.10 shot to prove the identity to the museum entomologist, Dr. C. N. Smithers, who was studying the movements of migrating butterflies. The wings were still in good condition and sufficient for identification. On a 1963 expedition to Sandringham and Marion Downs in western Queensland with the late Basil Marlow, the curator of mammals at the museum, small mammals were spotlighted at night from an open landrover and shot with the pistol using No. 10 shot. The following species were collected: Stripe-faced Dunnart *Sminthopsis macroura*; Jerboa marsupial or Kultarr *Antechinomys laniger spenceri*; Crested Marsupial rat or Kowari *Dasyuroides byrnei*; a true rodent, the Fawn Hopping Mouse *Notomys cervinus*. Lt.-Col. S. G. (Bill) Lane of the CMF was camped with his troops near Tianjara Falls just south of Nowra, NSW, in March 1964 for their annual camp when Disney came and camped by the Falls with museum preparator Rolf Lossin. Bill Lane, who is a good ornithologist, came to Disney's

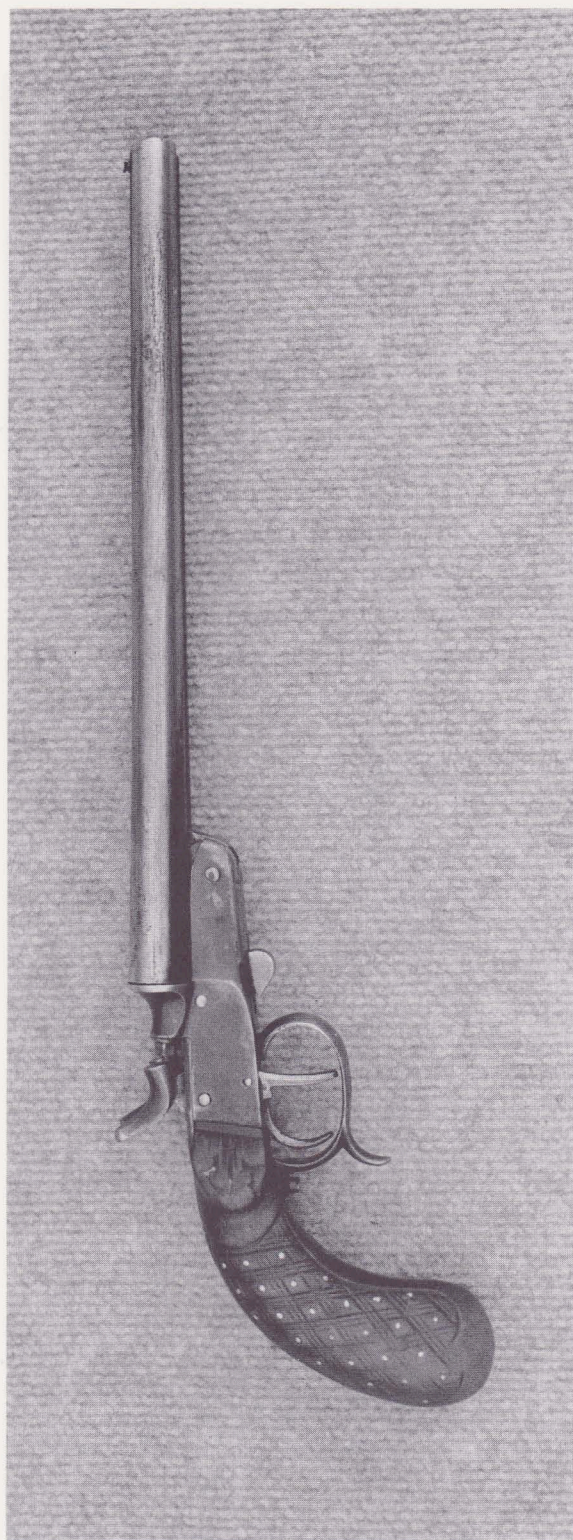


Fig. 3. Belgium double-barrelled .410 shotgun pistol as used by Disney.



Fig. 4. Belgium double-barrelled .410 shotgun pistol showing breech open for loading.



Fig. 5. Belgium double-barrelled .410 shotgun pistol with stock fitted.

camp and said, "follow me," which he did with Lossin driving the landrover. On top on the heath Bill Lane stopped and said this is where Chris Humphries and I found the nest of the Striated Fieldwren and extended its known range 150 miles north (see Humphries 1955). He went on with his driver and Disney and Lossin were about to follow when a small bird flew up and crossed the road and settled into a bush. Disney drew his pistol, leaned across Lossin and fired through the driver's window and shot it. When next Bill Lane stopped Disney got out holding up the bird and said "Is this the bird you meant Bill?" Of course, it was, much to Bill's amazement. This again showed the advantage of being quick on the "draw". In the Tanami Desert in 1965 two museum curators were collected. The first instance occurred when Basil Marlow and Disney were walking down the opposite sides of a dry water course and a Honeyeater flew into a bush. Disney said "Don't move, I want that bird," and shot it. Either the other curator had moved or one No. 10 pellet went sideways and hit him on the seam of his shirt by the shoulder and made a small red mark. The second curator, Harold Cogger, was lying on his swag at night suffering from a nasty boil on his bottom. Disney was shooting bats being spotlighted with torches and the spent No. 10 pellets were

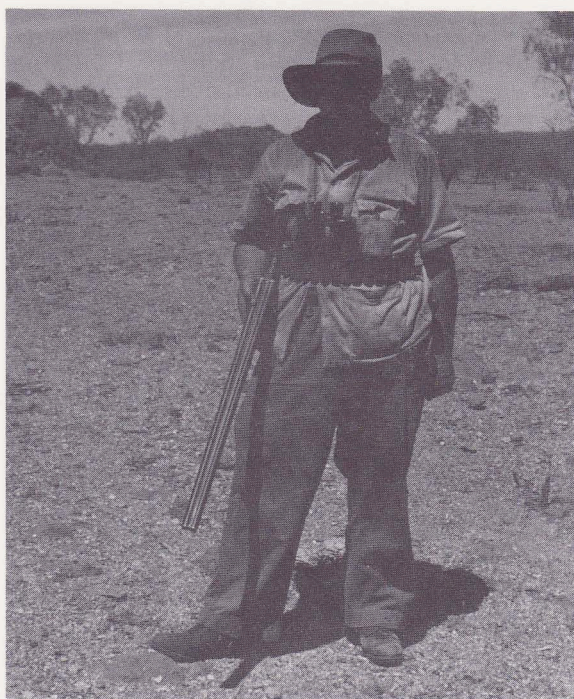


Fig. 6. Author John Disney in hunting gear with shotgun pistol slung on left side, hidden by left arm, and 12-bore shotgun in right arm. Photo taken on 11 April, 1965, at Mount Doreen, near Alice Springs, when collecting specimens for the Australian Museum with Hal Cogger, Basil Marlow and Ken Slater (biologist of Northern Territory).

Photo by H. Cogger.

falling on the Curator. Harold Cogger, a year earlier unknown to him, had been subjected to a "shotgun marriage" in St Paul's Chapel, University of Sydney. In the morning Disney had been out to Botany Bay shooting Common Terns for the Museum. Arriving at the chapel for the wedding in the afternoon he broke his 12 bore in two and put it in his big pack and hid it behind a bush, but the pistol he slung under his armpit where it was hidden by his jacket, while he attended the wedding ceremony.

To show how times have changed, when Disney flew to Alice Springs in 1965 he carried his pistol in his briefcase, and again in 1969, when he flew to Norfolk Island. He paid the policeman 2/6d for a licence to shoot on the island.

Thus ends the history of this pistol as known to me and its retirement to an "old peoples (pistol) home".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Mr Bevan Brown for requesting I wrote the history of this pistol as I knew it and Mr. Ederic Slater for taking the photographs of the pistol and Drs Harold Cogger and Peter Fullagar for those with Disney and pistol.

REFERENCE

HUMPHRIES, C. P., 1955. Striated FieldWren near Milton, NSW. *Emu* 55: 218-20.



Fig. 7. Disney holding the pistol, showing the two barrels and triggers.

Photo by P. Fullager, 10 Dec., 1992.



Fig. 8. Disney demonstrating firing pistol, holding it with both hands.

Photo by P. Fullager, 10 December, 1992.